

**Wednesday, June 30, 2021, 1:00 p.m. (ET)
Full Committee Legislative Hearing**

**H.R. 1317, “Vieques Recovery and
Redevelopment Act of 2021” and
H.R. 1126, “Vieques Recovery and
Redevelopment Act of 2021”**

OPENING STATEMENT

We are meeting today to discuss two bills that will provide compensation for residents of Vieques suffering as a result of U.S. military testing on the island. H.R. 1317, sponsored by Rep. Nydia Velázquez, and H.R. 1126, sponsored by Resident Commissioner Jenniffer González-Colón, would establish compensation for qualified residents of Vieques, and provide medical treatment and transportation for their care.

Starting in the early 1940’s, more than 80 million tons of ordnance and other weaponry were dropped on the eastern and western portions of Vieques. The result of these

exercises was to expose Americans living on the island to the residue of heavy metals and many chemicals that are known to cause harm to human health.

The more than 60 years of heavy bombardment contaminated the local food supply resulting in residents of Vieques having much higher incidents of cancer, diabetes, heart disease, and other illnesses.

According to the University of Puerto Rico Graduate School of Planning, the island of Vieques has a 269% higher rate of cancer, a 73% higher rate of heart disease and a 58% greater rate of diabetes than the rest of Puerto Rico. In addition, the Puerto Rico Bureau of Vital Statistics found that deaths on Vieques for liver disease are 95% higher and infant mortality was 55% higher than the rest of Puerto Rico.

As a result of sustained protest and pressure, in 2003, - my first year in Congress – the U.S. Navy withdrew from Vieques, but without

leaving in place a program for cleaning up the island or providing compensation for residents.

The bills we are considering today, which have been around in one form or another for more than a decade, set up a program for finally compensating residents of Vieques who live or have lived on the island and filed administrative claims. The amounts the bill will provide are comparable to what Americans in the western U.S. received under the *Radiation Exposure Compensation Act*.

Last December, the sponsors of the *Vieques Recovery and Redevelopment Act* were almost successful in securing inclusion of their bill in the *Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021*. They were able to secure the support of leaders in both the House and the Senate, but ran out of time before they could achieve their goal. Today's hearing is the first step in completing that effort.

I want to conclude by welcoming out witnesses and thanking them for taking the time to be here with us today. I want to especially welcome the Mayor of Vieques. Welcome Mr. Mayor. I look forward to receiving all your testimony.